

Stay on TRACK User Survey

October 2012: Survey Analysis

This survey assessed attitudes to Stay On TRACK, captured opinions about why students could or could not finish their degrees on time and returned basic information on credit loads and degrees sought. The results indicated that students are generally aware of Stay on TRACK but that students are not carrying sufficient loads to graduate in two/four years (associate/bachelor's). Students with less than 15 credits cite family and finance as the major reason but students doing 15 credits or more say they "just do it". The survey, and these analyses, should be used as a basis for future further enquiry on this important subject.



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Introduction

Stay on TRACK (TRACK) is a multi-faceted initiative of the University of Alaska (UA), focused on assisting University of Alaska system students to complete their undergraduate degrees in four years for bachelor's degrees (two years for associate degrees). By "staying on track", students spend significantly less on their degrees and rapidly add to Alaska's skilled talent pool, thereby increasing the competitiveness of Alaska in the national and world economies.

Stay on TRACK, initiated by UA President Gamble's dedication to graduate students on time, was launched with support of all three Major Administrative Units (MAUs) in late 2011. Kick-off events included Chancellor addresses, columns in prominent Alaskan publications including the Anchorage Daily News, Alaska Business Monthly and in campus newspapers. The campaign continues; the key to ongoing TRACK advocacy is its website, <http://www.alaska.edu/stayonTRACK/> (University of Alaska, 2012).

Six months into the campaign, it was time to take a quick look at reactions from students, faculty and staff. Hence, in April and May 2012, Student and Enrollment Services (SES) conducted a survey of reactions to Stay on TRACK with a questionnaire posted on the SES website and publicized through announcements and emails. Initial reaction to the survey was tepid, with only 40 student responses received. A revised approach was adopted and information about the survey was sent to all students at their UA email addresses. In addition, participating students were offered the opportunity to participate in a drawing for one of two \$500 Alaska College Savings Plan Certificates. These initiatives substantially increased the response rate. Ultimately, 1,360 responses from students were received, of which 1,337 were determined to be genuine returns, the majority of the remainder being duplicates. A much smaller set of responses, 42, was received from faculty and staff, in response to a related but different survey.

Survey Questionnaire



The survey was effected through a ROXEN-based instrument and was conducted between March 12, 2012, and May 23, 2012. Once the incentive was announced in early May (two Alaska College Savings Certificates), responses were returned every minute or so during working hours for a few days.



The student survey had 15 questions, divided into three types:

- six demographic/descriptive questions about credit loads, place of study, etc.;
- five questions assessing opinions/awareness of elements of TRACK and
- four open-ended questions expanding upon the opinion/awareness questions.

See Appendix One for a copy of the student survey instrument and Appendix Two for the faculty/staff instrument. Unless otherwise noted, “survey” in this report refers to the student survey as this was the focus of the study.

Responses were disaggregated by MAU, by degree sought and as well by whether the respondent indicated being from a main or a satellite campus. Response rates for University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) and University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) MAUs were similar, 4.5 percent and 4.9 percent of estimated total student enrollment, respectively, although University of Alaska Southeast’s (UAS’) rate at 0.3 percent was so low as to make conclusions difficult. A total of 30 associate degree students responded, meaning that only 0.5 percent of all enrolled associate students participated in the survey, also a low response rate; however, 9.0 percent of all enrolled bachelor’s students responded to the survey, a participation rate almost 18 times greater than that of associate degree candidates. Although Stay On TRACK is focused on students seeking a bachelor’s or associate degree, survey respondents covered the whole spectrum of options offered through UA, from certificates to doctoral candidates. Of those, 84 percent were BA/BS candidates, two percent AA/AAS, eight percent were MA/MS and six percent other such as doctoral or certificate (University of Alaska Anchorage (2010; University of Alaska Fairbanks (n.d.) and University of Alaska Southeast (2011)).

Survey respondents were self-selected, not randomly chosen, and the possibility of bias cannot be ruled out. Moreover, the survey assayed the students as they were enrolled in Spring 2012, and is simply a snapshot. They may have had totally different characteristics a semester before or a semester afterwards. In addition, open-ended questions had to be summarized and categorized into different response types, a necessarily laborious process open to some interpretation. Those caveats in mind, analyses presented below are done without reference to statistical significance. As such, the conclusions are indicators for future inquiry rather than sold as prima facie evidence of characteristics or findings.

Basic Descriptors

The average credit load (12.5) was approximately the minimum full-time load. No cohort came close to the load of 15 credits required to graduate “on time.” Satellite campus students carrying the lowest load at 9.9 credits; UAF had the highest average at 13.2 credits. However, there is an apparent disconnect between credit load and time to completion: UAF with the highest average load also



reported the greatest planned years to completion (4.2). By the same token, satellite students planned on taking the fewest years (3.5) to complete their degrees, despite the lowest credit loads and them being overwhelmingly BA/BS seekers (93 percent). AA/AAS students carried an average of 11.4 credits and BA/BS 12.5. Associate students planned on completing in 2.5 years and bachelor’s in 4.1 years.

Two-thirds of UA’s students work. As anyone involved with financial aid knows, money, or lack thereof, is always high on students’ concerns. Survey respondents were no exception. Work is important for many of them, nearly two-thirds, and only 34 percent of respondents reported not working at all, with just 26 percent of satellite students not working. UAF students were the least likely to work (36 percent did not work at all), whereas 32 percent of UAA students did not work. In fact, 30 percent of responding students work full-time, constituting a potential drain on academic performance.

These figures are in contrast to comparable to national characteristics

Working?	>=12 Credits	>=15 Credits	<12 Credits	<15 Credits
UA-Any work	63%	61%	77%	69%
UA-Part time	40%	43%	22%	32%
UA-Full time	23%	18%	55%	37%
NCES-Any	40%		73%	
NCES-Part	33%		40%	
NCES-Full	7%		33%	

National Center for Educational Statistics, NCES (2010)

Thus, the UA student with >= 12 credits is more than 50 percent more likely to work than is her/his counterpart elsewhere in the US. That difference largely disappears for part-time students: 77 percent of part-timers at UA work at least part-time, versus 73 percent nationally. However, the UA part-timer is significantly more likely to work fulltime than is her/his counterpart (55 percent versus 33 percent).

Impressions of Student Services Offerings

Most respondents (63 percent) are aware of Stay on TRACK. At 70 percent, UAF is the cohort with the highest fraction, which compares to 59 percent at UAA and 52 percent at satellite campuses. By contrast, 63 percent of students at main campuses indicated knowledge of Stay on TRACK. Awareness of TRACK varied markedly between associate and bachelor’s students: only 34 percent of associate degree students were moderately to extremely aware of TRACK, versus 64 percent of bachelor’s students.



A significant majority (84 percent) of respondents had a neutral or more positive impression of Stay on TRACK. Interestingly, students at satellite campuses had a more positive view (95 percent neutral or better) than did those at main campuses (83 percent neutral or better). This was comparable to associate students, 92 percent of whom had a neutral or better impression, in contrast to 83 percent of BA/BS students.

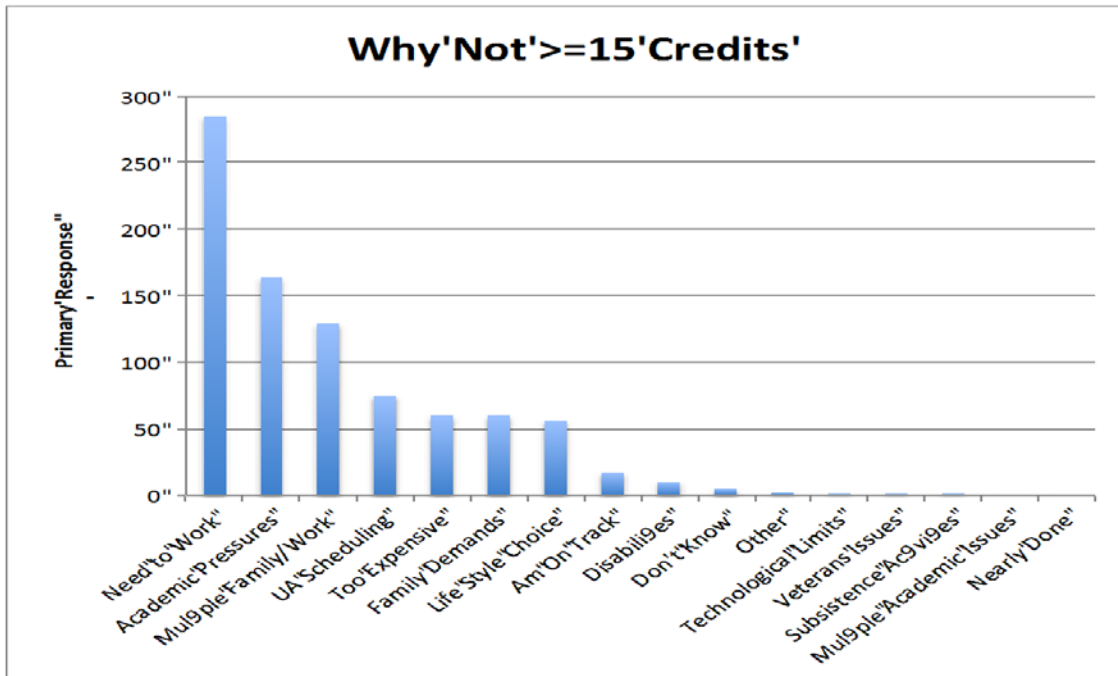
A similarly significant majority (81 percent) was extremely to moderately aware of DegreeWorks. DegreeWorks is the University's academic planning tool. Students were most aware at UAA (83 percent) and least at satellite campuses' (77 percent). A total of 82 percent of BA/BS students were extremely to moderately aware of DegreeWorks, but only 57 percent of associate students had that level of awareness.

15 Credit Issues

Respondents generally know it takes at least 15 credits per semester to graduate "on time".

Systemwide, 83 percent of respondents reported knowing the requirement, with UAF having the highest awareness at 90 percent. UAA respondents (79 percent) and satellite campus respondents (81 percent) were less likely to know of the 15-credit rule than were students at main campuses (83 percent). However, only 69 percent of AA/AAS students reported being aware of the 15 credit requirements, versus 83 percent of BA/BS students.

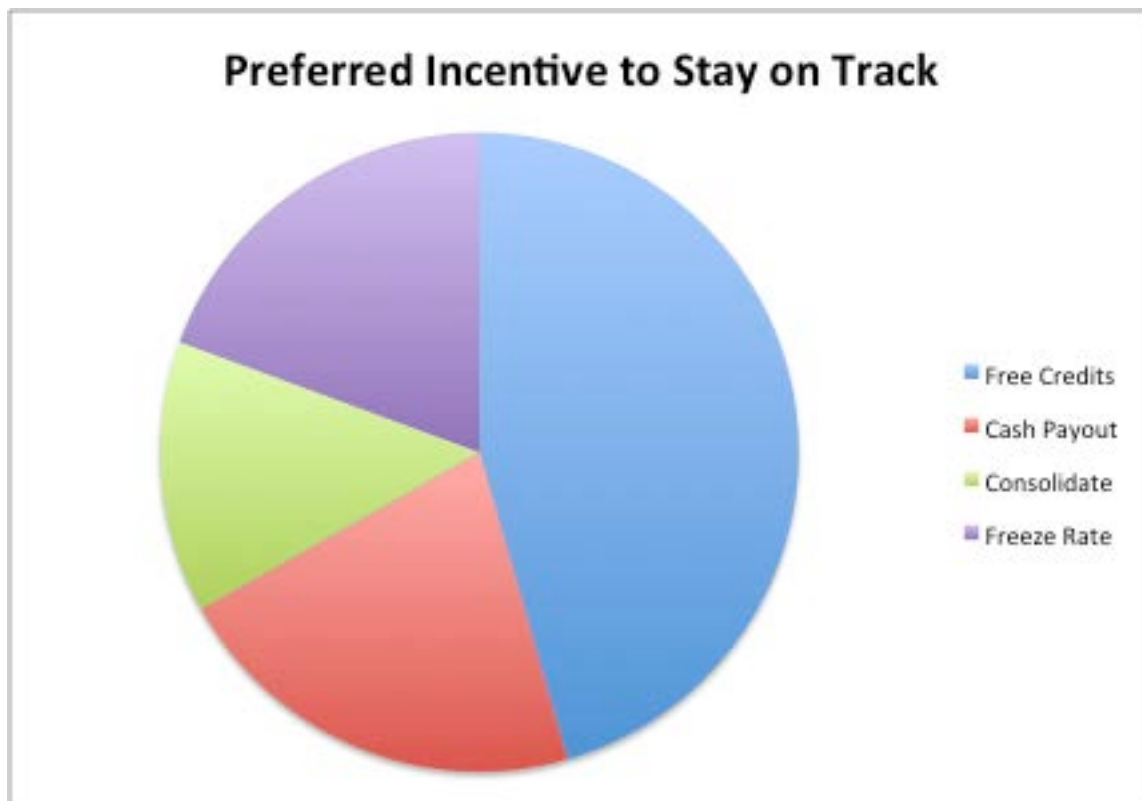
Most commonly, respondents cited family and/or financial issues for not maintaining at least a 15-credit load (63 percent). Respondents at satellite campuses were most likely to give such an explanation (80 percent) and students at UAA were least likely to cite such (62 percent). Interestingly, only 55 percent of AA/AS students reported being limited by financial/family issues, versus 64 percent of BA/BS candidates. On the other hand, AA/AAS and UAA students were the most likely to indicate that scheduling or UA regulations prevented them from taking 15 credits or more (25 percent and 10 percent, respectively), compared to 9 percent systemwide and just six percent at UAF. At 29 percent, UAF students were the most likely to cite personal reasons (such as simply not wishing to take a high load or finding it to be too challenging academically), whereas only 13 percent of satellite students gave their main reason as personal.



As mentioned, a limited number of faculty and staff participated in a similar TRACK survey. Therein, they took similar views of why students did not take a 15-credit load: 62 percent felt that financial and/or family matters were the major determinants in why students did not do so.

Personal choice is why students take 15 credits a semester. For students taking a 15-credit load or more, all types of students were most likely to identify personal choice as the guiding factor (50 percent), as was the case with BA/BS students (49 percent). Slightly more UAA than UAF students indicated personal choice as a factor-51 percent versus 48 percent. Overall, 38 percent of students said that financial and family support were the main cause of them being able to take 15 or more credits; again, UAA students were the most likely to cite such (40 percent) among the MAUs, although notably 55 percent of all satellite students saw family and financial support as the most important factor enabling a 15 credit load.

Free credits are the best incentive to graduate in four years. As an incentive to graduating in four years, respondents most commonly cited giving free credits (46 percent), followed closely by a cash payout (21 percent) and freezing the tuition rate (19 percent), and by having a flat rate during one’s last two years, no matter how many credits were taken (14 percent), known as the “consolidated” rate. BA/BS students most preferred free credits (45 percent), whereas AA/AAS students most sought a cash payout (38 percent).



Students want scheduling and administrative assistance. In order to complete the degree faster (without reference to a 15 credit load), students overwhelmingly requested scheduling and administrative assistance from UA (47 percent), with very little inter-MAU and/or main/satellite campus variation¹. Interestingly, only 19 percent systemwide thought that financial assistance from UA would be beneficial, reflecting perhaps realism about the low likelihood of potential UA types of aid. Faculty and staff agreed: the most common response was scheduling and administrative assistance (48 percent), followed by advising (26 percent) and then family/financial (22 percent). BA/BS students were similar in desiring better scheduling/different regulations as their preferred assistance from UA (45 percent and 47 percent, respectively).

In order to maintain a 15 credit load or higher, the most commonly cited type of assistance was advising ---more and/or better---at 41 percent of total respondents. Interestingly, only 36 percent of UAA respondents were interested in more/improved academic advising, unlike UAF where 47 percent sought better/more advising. AA/AAS students were about evenly split between needing better

¹ “Administrative assistance” here refers to help understanding UA’s various regulations, common sense waivers of some General Education Requirements (GERs) and aid in reducing waitlisting and scheduling conflicts.



advising and more financial/family resources (37 percent and 42 percent respectively), whereas BA/BS students had a fairly strong interest in better advising (42 percent) with the remaining preferences more equally spread between other choices.

Summary and Conclusion

The UA students who responded to the survey represent a diverse group:

- The average bachelor's student at UA carries at 12.5 credit load and plans on graduating in 4.1 years; the average associate student enrolls in 11.4 credits and hopes to graduate in 2.5 years. *Neither of these credit loads (12.5/11.4 credits) is sufficient to graduate in the students' planned graduation periods, nor are they sufficient to graduate on time.*
- Interestingly, most students DO work---more so than the national average, reconfirming the oft-stated mantra that UA students do not "fit the mold."
- For not taking at least 15 credits/semester, the most common reason cited is financial and/or family reasons. However, the converse is not true: if students can take 15 credits or more, they do so because of personal motivation and choice, rather than finance/family. There is thus a disconnect between taking 15 credits and not: finance can prevent you from taking 15 credits, but personal motivation makes you take 15 or more.
- Awareness of Stay on TRACK, Degree Works and the 15-credit requirement is generally high as is the impression of Stay on TRACK. However, there is a major difference between TRACK impressions on AA/AS students and their BA/BS counterparts with the latter much more aware.
- In addition, proportionately fewer AA/AAS students responded to the survey, possibly due to proportionately fewer of them even knowing about the program (34 percent) versus 63 percent systemwide.
- The most common recurrent request from students was for increased advising and better scheduling/UA regulations. This was the case with both AA/AAS and BA/BS students.

This diversity gives a good prescription for future work on TRACK. Specifically, the most pressing need is for TRACK to better serve AA/AAAS students, who represent +/- 32 percent of the head count systemwide. In addition,

- the availability and quality of advising could be reviewed. RelevanceLogic's report on the Strategic Direction Initiative's listening sessions supports this and suggests that advising is known to be an area that should be strengthened (RelevanceLogic, 2012);
- scheduling, waitlisting and GER requirements are common concerns of students;
- given the higher than average rates of work by UA students already, careful consideration is needed on the impacts of tuition increases on students, particularly nontraditional ones with families to support;
- given that neither bachelor's nor associate students anticipate graduating either in 4/2 years, respectively, or even in the 4.1/2.5 years that students plan on, UA needs continued messaging about the need for 15 credit academic loads; and

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- due to the very low response rate from the UAS MAU and from faculty/staff, additional work should be done to assay their attitudes on, and impressions of, the program. These are key groups that have to date not participated significantly in the survey.



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Appendix One

Student Survey

Please complete the following survey of your enrollment and degree completion activity and views. This information is being collected by the university to assess student interest in degree completion, and survey responses will inform future *Stay on TRACK* planning. *Stay on TRACK* encourages students to take 30 credits a year, choose a major, meet with their advisor, consider summer enrollment and use DegreeWorks at UAOnline.

Survey responses will remain confidential. Data will be reported in unattributed aggregate.

WIN STUFF! All students who complete the five-minute survey by **Wednesday, May 16** will be entered into a drawing for one of two \$500 Alaska College Savings Plan awards. If you wish to enter the drawing, please enter your name and contact information at the end of this survey. **We will not use your name or contact address except to enter you into the drawing.**

1) Please tell us about your educational goal and timeframe for it.

Select one:

Goal: Certificate, Associate's degree, Bachelors degree, Masters degree, Doctorate degree, None of the above

Select one:

Time Frame: 1 Year, 2 Years, 3 Years, 4 Years, 5 years, 6 Years, 7 Years, 8 Years, 9 Years, 10 Years

2) How many credits to you typically complete each semester?

Choose a credit amount: 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15,16,17,18,19,20,21,22

If it's less than 15, what prevents you from taking 15 or more credits?



Please respond here.

If it's more than 15, what support do you have that helps you take more than 15 credits?

Please respond here.

3) Were you aware that DegreeWorks at UAOnline will show you your progress towards graduation?

Not at all aware

Slightly aware

Moderately aware

Very aware

Extremely aware

4) Did you know a student must complete a minimum of 15 credits a semester to:

- **Graduate in two years with a typical 60-credit associate's degree?**
- **Graduate in four years with a typical 120-credit baccalaureate degree?**

Not at all aware

Slightly aware

Moderately aware

Very aware

Extremely aware

5) If the university could assist in your completing your academic goal faster, what might that look like?



Please respond here.

6) What student support or academic assistance would be helpful to you with a 15+ credit load?

Please respond here.

7) Are you the first in your family to attend college? Select one:

Yes

No

8) Are you currently employed?

I work full time

I work part time

I am not currently employed

9) If the University of Alaska were to offer you a financial incentive to complete your degree on schedule, which incentive is more appealing to you?

Free credits for each year you complete at least 30 credits

\$500 cash payout upon graduation with associates degree in two years; \$1000 cash payout upon graduation with bachelors degree in four years

Freezing tuition at the freshman level for four years if you complete 30 credits toward your degree each year

10) Are you aware of the university's Stay on TRACK campaign? The Stay on TRACK campaign encourages students to:



1. Take at least 30 credit hours per year.
2. Register early to get the classes you need.
3. Ask an academic advisor and use DegreeWorks.
4. Choose a major by your third semester and stick with it.
5. Keep up your grades.

Not at all aware

Slightly aware

Moderately aware

Very aware

Extremely aware

If you indicated some level of awareness, what is your impression of the campaign?

Completely negative

Somewhat negative

Neither negative or positive

Somewhat positive

Completely positive

Which UA campus are you from?

Select a campus: UAA – Anchorage, UAA - Chugiak-Eagle River, UAA - Kachemak Bay, UAA - Kenai Peninsula, UAA – Kodiak, UAA - Prince William Sound, UAF – Chuckchi, UAF – CRCDD, UAF – Fairbanks, UAF - Interior-Aleutians, UAF – Northwest, UAS – Ketchikan, UAS – Juneau, UAS - Sitka

*** NOT REQUIRED, but if you want to be considered for the drawing, please complete the information below.**



Your email address:

Your first and last name:



Appendix Two

Faculty/Staff Survey

Please complete the following survey on UA's student enrollment and degree completion activity. This information is being collected to assess internal views on student degree completion. Survey responses will inform future **Stay on TRACK** planning.

Stay on TRACK encourages students to take 30 credits a year, choose a major, meet with their advisor, consider summer enrollment and use DegreeWorks at UAOnline. Survey responses will remain confidential. Data will be reported in unattributed aggregate.

WIN STUFF! All faculty/staff who complete the five-minute survey by Wednesday, May 16 will be entered into a drawing for a \$50 Amazon gift card. If you wish to enter the drawing, please enter your name and contact at the end of this survey. **We will not use your name or contact address except to enter you into the drawing.**

1) UA's four year graduation rate is 10 percent; the national average is 30 percent. What is the main challenge facing degree-seeking students that prevents their completion in four years?

Please respond here.

2) Is it the university's responsibility to inform students that taking fewer credits a semester will cost them more time and money to complete their degree?

Please respond here.

3) What is the main reason that you believe students don't enroll in additional credits?

Please respond here.

4) At UA, each additional 3-credit class per year a student takes raises a student's probability of graduating with a bachelor degree in six years by eight percent. What resources should the university provide to encourage students to take an additional 3-credit class? Check all that apply.

additional advising

course sequencing

additional financial aid

more course sections

other



If other please explain.

5) The Stay on TRACK campaign initially focused on first-time, full-time baccalaureate seeking students. In fall 2013 the campaign will expand to include associates seeking students. How should the current message be changed to meet the needs of the associates seeking students?

The Stay on TRACK campaign encourages students to:

1. Take at least 30 credit hours per year.
2. Register early to get the classes you need.
3. Ask an academic advisor and use DegreeWorks.
4. Choose a major by your third semester and stick with it.
5. Keep up your grades.

Please respond here.

6) Are you in favor of promoting summer enrollment as a method for students to complete their degree faster?

yes

no

7) Did you know that research shows that part-time students rarely graduate with a degree or certificate – even when they have twice as much time?

Not at all aware

Slightly aware

Moderately aware

Very aware

Extremely aware

8) If you were assisting your own child or other family member to enroll in college, how many credits would you advise them to enroll in, and why?

Please respond here.

Which UA campus are you from?

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Select a campus: UAA – Anchorage, UAA - Chugiak-Eagle River, UAA - Kachemak Bay, UAA - Kenai Peninsula, UAA – Kodiak, UAA - Prince William Sound, UAF – Chuckchi, UAF – CRCD, UAF – Fairbanks, UAF - Interior-Aleutians, UAF – Northwest, UAS – Ketchikan, UAS – Juneau, UAS – Sitka

*** NOT REQUIRED, but if you want to be considered for the drawing, please complete the information below.**

Your email address:

Your first and last name: